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SUBJECT: NO GOU COMMENT ON CASTRO CONFIRMATION

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¶1. (U) While Raul Castro's confirmation as President of Cuba was reported prominently in the media, as of February 26, the GOU had not made an official statement. Major dailies El Observador, El Pais, and Ultimas Noticias ran columns critical of the Castro "dynasty," and the lack of any move towards democracy. The most prominent leftist newspaper, La Republica, came to Raul Castro's defense and called the transition "original, intelligent and non-traumatic."

¶2. (U) Key figures from the two major opposition parties registered their criticism of the Castro exchange. Former president Jorge Batlle (Colorado Party), who broke diplomatic relations with Cuba in 2002, said he wished that "freedom be established in Cuba once and for all." He also indicated that "Fidel Castro is not a dictator, but a murderer" alluding to the executions of regime opponents caught when trying to flee the country. Meanwhile, Former President Luis Alberto Lacalle (Blanco Party), called him "one of the worst dictators in history has fallen." He doubted whether Castro relinquishing power would actually "entail a benefit" for Cubans since, he said, after almost 50 years, "there are values that are deeply rooted into a society that doesn't know anything different from this socialist government."

¶3. (SBU) COMMENT: The GOU's silence till now is understandable. Uruguayans place a very high premium on democracy and while some in the left-leaning Frente Amplio government may sympathize with Cuba's "revolution," the patently un-democratic transition is hard for them to applaud. In addition, Cuba's most vocal backer in the GOU, Foreign Minister Gargano, is on the way out of office, departing March 1 (reftel).
Baxter